

Measuring socioeconomic background for widening access purposes

Vikki Boliver, Stephen Gorard and Nadia Siddiqui

NERUPI event on Socio-Economic Class and Inequalities in Education
25th January 2023

Indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage

Area-level indicators

POLAR Q1/Q1+2

TUNDRA Q1/Q1+2

IMD & IDACI Q1/Q1+2

ACORN 4+5

Individual-level indicators

Free school meals

(Low household income)

(Care-experienced)

(Working-class background)

(First generation university student)

School-level indicators

School with high % FSM pupils

School with low average attainment

School with low post-16 progression

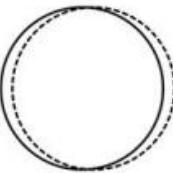
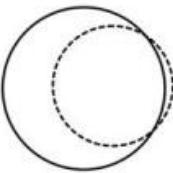
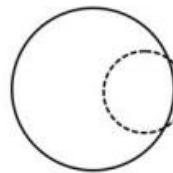
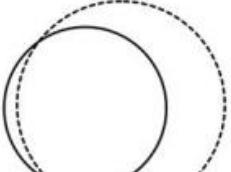
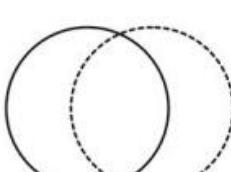
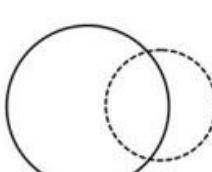
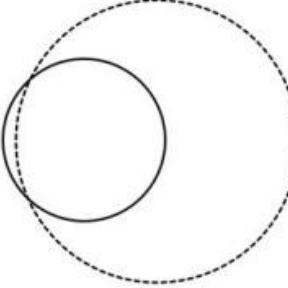
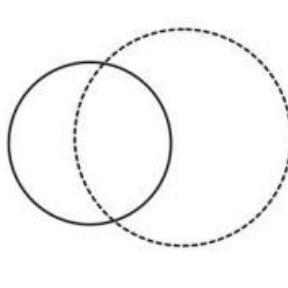
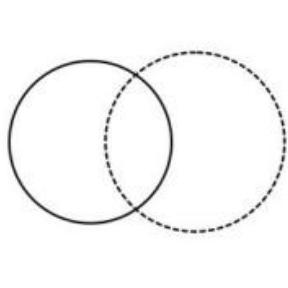
State school

Composite indicators

MEM ([UCAS](#))

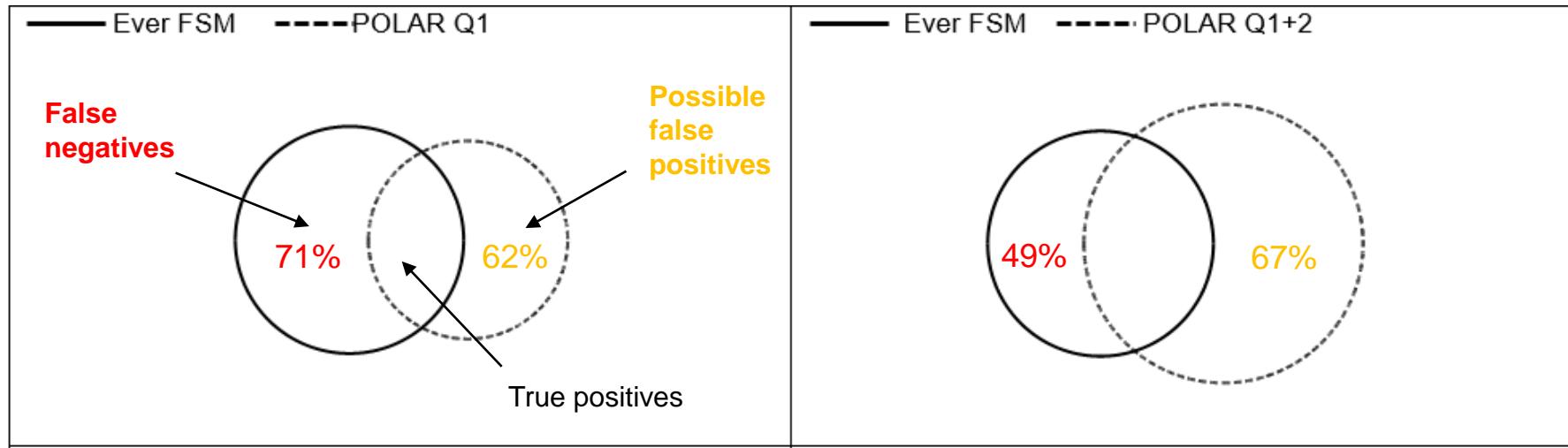
ABCS ([OfS](#))

False negatives and false positives

	Few false negatives	Some false negatives	Many false negatives
Few false positives	A1 	A2 	A3 
Some false positives	B1 	B2 	B3 
Many false positives	C1 	C2 	C3 

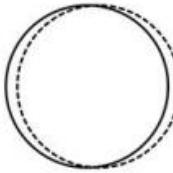
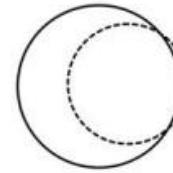
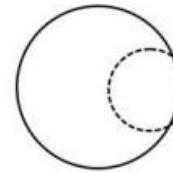
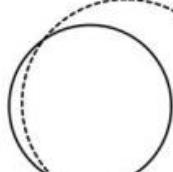
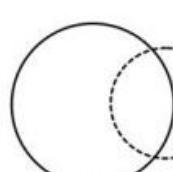
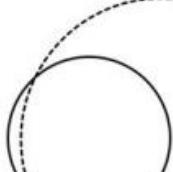
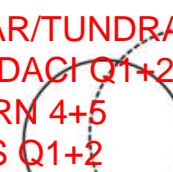
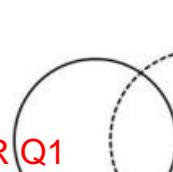
Free school meals

POLAR produces many false negatives and many possible false positives



Source: [Boliver, Gorard and Siddiqui \(2022\) Who counts as socioeconomically disadvantaged for the purposes of widening access to higher education? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*](#). NPD data for those aged 17/18 in 2018/19 or 2019/20.

False negatives and false positives

Key	Few false negatives	Some false negatives	Many false negatives
Genuinely disadvantaged Identified by measure as disadvantaged	A1	A2	A3
Few false positives			
		Free school meals	
Some false positives	B1	B2	B3
			
		IMD/IDACI Q1 ABCS Q1 School % FSM	
Many false positives	C1	C2	C3
			
	MEM Q1+2 State school	POLAR/TUNDRA Q1+2 IMD/IDACI Q1+2 ACORN 4+5 ABCS Q1+2 MEM Q1 School mean Att8 School % prog. to KS5	POLAR Q1 TUNDRA Q1 School mean Att8 School % prog. to KS5

Implications for WP policy & practice

- Widening access interventions that rely on indicators producing many **false negatives will fail to reach many intended beneficiaries**
- Widening access interventions that reply on indicators producing many **false positives will reach many unintended beneficiaries**
- Area-level, school-level and composite indicators are **poor proxies for socioeconomic disadvantage at the individual-level**
- Need to prioritise the use of **officially verified individual-level indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage**, such as receipt of free school meals